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Leprosy Awareness Month and World Leprosy Day Proclamation Signing

The Department of Public Health and Social Services (DPHSS), Bureau of Communicable Disease Control (BCDC) Tuberculosis/Hansen's Disease Control Program, are pleased to invite the public to the **2026 Leprosy Awareness Month and World Leprosy Day Proclamation Signing Ceremony**. The event will take place on **Friday, January 23rd, 2026 at 11:30 a.m.** at the Governor's Large Conference Room in Adelup.

Background:

January 25 is World Leprosy Day 2026, an annual event observed worldwide on the last Sunday of January. In 1954, French journalist and activist Raoul Follereau created World Leprosy Day to coincide with Mahatma Ghandi's death anniversary on January 30, 1948.

Guam Leprosy Profile:

- **Hansen's disease incidence rate is 11.0 per 10,000 population.**
- **Guam Leprosy cases from 2011 to 2025; 175 cases with 11 new cases identified in 2025.**
- **Most leprosy patients are aged between 15 and 44 years, mostly males and non-US born**

"Guam remains a leader in the Western Pacific Region's efforts to eliminate leprosy," said DPHSS Director Theresa C. Arriola. "Last year, Guam became the first jurisdiction in the region to implement the self-guided, country-specific version of the Global Partners for Zero Leprosy (GPZL) Model," said Director Arriola.

The Guam Path to Zero Leprosy Roadmap and Action Plan 2024–2030 marks a key milestone in the Tuberculosis/Hansen's Disease Control Program's mission to eliminate leprosy in Guam, and highlights the program's progress. Guam's experience developing the Roadmap and Action Plan offers valuable insights for GPZL and partner countries on how to effectively apply the self-guided implementation model to accelerate progress toward a leprosy-free future in the region and globally.

Under Director Arriola's leadership, GPZL has proposed partnering with the Guam Leprosy Program on a pilot project to develop a urine-based test for leprosy identification. Director Arriola noted in discussions with the GPZL team, lead by Dr. Ritu Ghosh, that a urine-based lipoarabinomannan (LAM) test for leprosy could significantly improve disease detection and monitoring. This test would give clinicians an additional diagnostic tool to complement standard skin examinations and bacterial testing.

Leprosy (also known as Hansen's disease) is one of the oldest diseases known to humankind. Leprosy still exists! Leprosy is a chronic infectious disease that predominantly affects the skin and peripheral nerves. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), leprosy is curable and treatment in the early stages can prevent disability. However, if left untreated, Leprosy can have long-term consequences, including deformities and disabilities, which are associated with stigma.

- Hansen's **disease does not spread easily from person to person.** You cannot get Leprosy through casual contact, such as shaking hands, sitting next to, or talking to someone who has the disease.
- Prolonged, close contact with someone with untreated Hansen's disease over many months is needed to become infected. Around 95% of all people cannot become sick because they are naturally immune.
- Leprosy can be cured with antibiotic treatment. Once someone starts treatment for Hansen's disease, they can no longer spread the disease to other people.

For more information about this event, please contact the Tuberculosis /Hansen's Disease Control Program at **Tel: 1 (671) 788 - 4033 | (671) 788 – 4098 or email: tb.program@dphss.guam.gov**

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